



Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
A Partnership for Preservation

ANNUAL REPORT

PROTECT | RESTORE | EDUCATE

FROM THE *Executive Director*

➔ For more than 30 years, the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative has been a nonprofit partner of two federal land management agencies: the USDA Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Changes in presidential administrations always bring some turbulence. Old policies and political appointees disappear and are replaced with new people, policies, and initiatives. Usually, the transitions are like course correcting a supertanker—modest change in an otherwise momentum-driven direction. I had been through several transitions before, but the 2025 transition to the second Trump administration had the makings of something quite different.

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), established on January 20, 2025, as a Day One executive order, took the federal government by storm. DOGE staffers embedded themselves in myriad agencies, started purging federal employees, and began halting many contractor payments—especially in areas that had been Biden administration priorities. Conversations with peers at other organizations brought chilling reports. One executive received a late-night call that urged him to immediately purge his organization's website of all references to climate change or funding would be terminated. Another's outdoor equity organization had funding committed for getting Black and brown kids into the outdoors, but those grants were abruptly cancelled. The fear of losing funding was palpable. However, like the proverbial fog of war, it was sometimes hard to know what was real versus what was not.

While this agency turmoil was unfolding, CFI had a \$307,000 reimbursement request pending for work performed in

2024 under a Great American Outdoors Act grant agreement. Knowing that even the smoothest presidential transition involves a few bumps, I had requested that this reimbursement be submitted in the fall—well before the late January transition—to ensure it didn't get hung up. Historically, payment had been received in a matter of days, but anxious weeks passed as we waited for the reimbursement. If we weren't going to get paid for work already performed under an existing grant, there was little hope of receiving the \$276,000 in obligated funds for projects slated for 2025 and 2026. The financial hit to our budget would have been massive.

Beyond money, there was also the potential impact to CFI's work from departed agency staff. The Forest Service, our principal partner, has a complex and multilayered organizational structure. Key project details are often handled by staff in 17 ranger districts across the state. We also work on funding agreements and policy matters with staff in six different national forests, the Rocky Mountain region, and the national office in D.C. For most of 2025, every phone call or email began with some version of a proof-of-life question: Are you still there? Doing the same job? Who has taken over that responsibility now that X is no longer there? While there were retirements and other departures, too, a critical mass of proven partners remained to help us get projects completed.

Although it took several months to settle down, CFI emerged from all the DOGE chaos in good shape. And we eventually learned the nature of the reimbursement delay: We had submitted the request on the wrong form. (There



A mountain goat grazes on tundra plants on Mount Democrat.

“Trouble is only opportunity
in work clothes.”

—Henry J. Kaiser

are many, as you might imagine.) Once we re-submitted the request, the 2024 reimbursement was promptly paid. The 2025 partner agreements, despite needing to go through additional layers of review, were approved and operated normally. Although we did lose the roughly \$135,000 in annual partner funding, which had been announced in 2024, by the end of December 2025 we had received unexpectedly good funding news.

CFI's strong performance on past Great American Outdoors Act grants put us at the front of the line for receiving funds freed up from other organizations' unsuccessful projects. More than \$1 million was authorized to help three CFI efforts: 1) restarting the Mount Columbia trail project that was paused in 2020 after five seasons, 2) beginning a long-planned, two-season trail reconstruction project on Mount Princeton, and 3) putting in additional focused work on the Grays Peak trail.

Additionally, the Forest Service structured an “unfunded” authorizing agreement for CFI. This authorized our privately funded work on national forests in Colorado, even though the agency would not be providing any cash. As a key Forest Service official remarked, “If we can't trust CFI after 30 years, who can we trust?”

Building summit trails, restoring damaged tundra, and educating fourteener hikers is neither controversial nor political. Our donors run the political spectrum, and they have embraced our hands-on trail stewardship—bolstered by volunteers from across the country—regardless of which party holds power. We show up in our work clothes every day to do incredibly difficult work in remote locations and at high elevations. Yes, last year was a challenging one, with a lot of uncertainty. However, through years of showing up and getting the work done, we were rewarded with more money to do more hard work over the coming few years. That's trouble we'll sign up for every day.

Regards,

Lloyd F. Athearn

Lloyd F. Athearn
Executive Director

OUR FIXED-SITE TRAIL CREWS enjoyed an expanded menu in 2025. Unlike in 2024, when our construction teams were dispatched to two very familiar mountains, 2025 offered a richer palate of mountain work across four distinct peaks. We, of course, went back to Mount Shavano—our fourth successive year there—but trail crews also spent time on Mounts Democrat, Bierstadt, and Blue Sky, peaks that were overdue for attention.

Mount Shavano

LOW CREW

➔ After three consecutive years of toiling on what now feels like CFI’s home mountain, we returned in summer 2025 to Mount Shavano for year four. As in past seasons, CFI had two separate crews working on the 14,230-foot Sawatch Range peak, one below treeline and one closer to 13,500 feet.

Before the summer began, CFI field programs manager Tom Cronin had a sense that 2025’s to-do list on the lower part of the mountain would be taxing. The six-person crew only needed to complete 1,500 linear feet of new trail—far less than it had done in prior seasons—but the terrain was different this time. “There was an insane cross slope, it was really rocky, and there was just no soil,” Cronin says.

As CFI crews often do, Cronin and his team invented a solution. To create a durable walking surface for hikers, they tried a new construction technique where they selectively removed rocks and other materials instead of implementing a more typical full bench, which cuts the entire width of the tread and relocates excavated soil. The innovation was a success. In fact, the method worked so well the team completed the third and final reroute on the lower mountain ahead of schedule. That banked time allowed the lower team to close off the old social trail (eliminating the need to hike through a seasonal stream), open the entire lower trail



1

to the public in late August, and move higher on the mountain to stabilize a massive erosion scar.

CFI had anticipated that the Mount Shavano summit trail project would be a six-year endeavor. By the end of field season 2025, it became clear that the team’s ingenuity and sweat equity had shaved a full year—and hundreds of thousands of dollars—off that original estimate. Instead of a 2027 completion date, CFI will finish the most ambitious project in its 31-year history in 2026.

1. A heavy-lift helicopter delivers timber to Mount Shavano.

2. The low crew spent time at the end of the season stabilizing the scar created by the old social trail.

3. Allie Shedleski shoulder-carries a log that will become a check step.

4/5. Before/After: The low crew cut new trail on the third and final forest reroute.

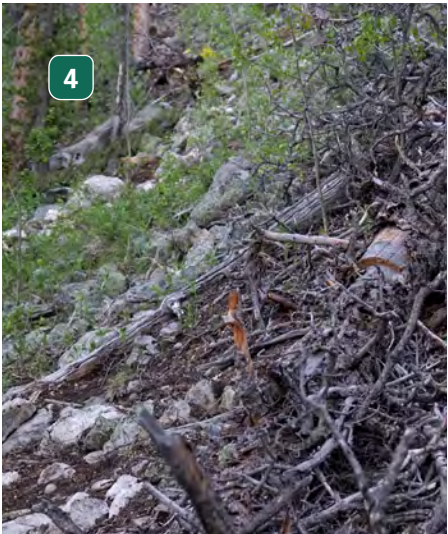
6. Tyler Warren deploys a McLeod tool during full-bench construction.



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5

3,987

Cubic feet of soil relocated on low Shavano

17

Timber check steps installed on low Shavano

1,329

Linear feet of new trail constructed on low Shavano

2,348

Square feet of rip-rap wall erected on low Shavano



6

PROTECT BUILDING TRAILS

Mount Shavano

HIGH CREW

➔ It would be fair to say the high crew—a cadre of eight ringers with extensive rock work experience—endured a similarly difficult field season in 2025. After a two-hour, 3,000-foot-elevation-gain commute every day, the team then spent its time cutting nearly 1,000 linear feet of new trail at roughly 13,500-plus feet and executing multi-pitch griphoist moves to relocate desk-size stones.

In a terrain seemingly full of rocks, there were somehow very few usable ones, a serious obstacle when the action items included building a slew of rock steps to help climbers gain elevation quickly without stepping off the trail. Furthermore, the high crew continually encountered bedrock, a factor that complicated efforts to build the trail as originally designed. Still the team persevered and brought the path to within roughly 600 linear feet of the summit. They also built a massive 24-step staircase that Cronin says is easily “the coolest structure on the entire mountain.”

In 2026, the high crew will return to complete the final push to the summit while the low crew will focus on deferred maintenance and restoration work, including partnering with Catherine Kleier, Ph.D., a professor of biology, ecology, and environmental science at Metropolitan State University of Denver, on a research project that could help inform how CFI revegetates damaged alpine tundra in the future.

MAJOR FUNDERS

Saguguachipa Foundation, USDA Forest Service—Great American Outdoors Act, CPW State Trails Program, American Trails—Legacy Trails Program, Chrest Foundation, Richard Hoffman, Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation, individual CFI donors



2



1

1. Griffin Ganz wrestles with a large boulder destined for a structure high on Mount Shavano.

2/3. Before/After: This is what transformation looks like: steep tundra turned into a cribbed rock staircase.

4. Kim Cathcart uses a rock bar to nudge along a boulder being transported uphill by a griphoist.



3

1,073

Square feet of backwall built on high Shavano

113

Cribbed rock steps installed on high Shavano

1,749

Cubic feet of soil moved on high Shavano

980

Linear feet of new trail constructed on high Shavano



4

PROTECT BUILDING TRAILS

1



581

Square feet of restoration work

62

Cribbed rock steps installed

54

Trees felled

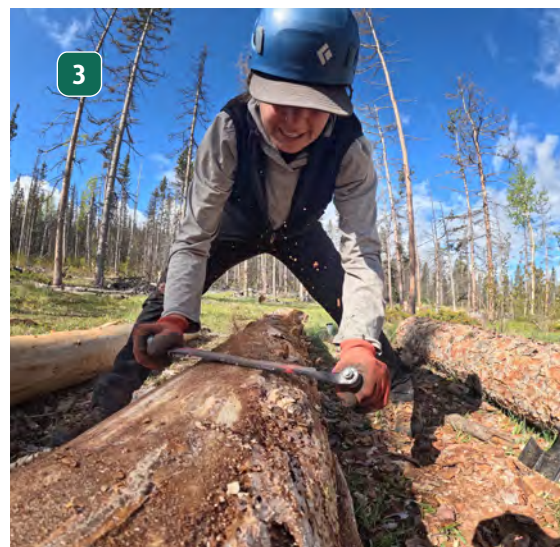
672

Cubic feet of soil excavated

2



3



- 1. Volunteers fireline rocks across tundra above Kite Lake.
- 2. Rocky Mountain Youth Corps members assemble gabion baskets to create retaining walls.
- 3. Kate Barrett preps timber for installation as check steps.
- 4/5. Before/After: Backwall and timber check steps dramatically transform a section of eroded trail on Mount Democrat.

4



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Mount Democrat

EAST SLOPE ROUTE

➔ The Decalibron Loop—a 7.5-mile circuit of four named fourteeners, including Mount Democrat, in the Mosquito Range—has always been a peakbagger's delight. However, access has often been limited due to landowner liability concerns. Fortunately, the 2023 acquisition of 300 acres of private mining claims—which CFI helped The Conservation Fund accomplish—ultimately brought a large swath of land on 14,154-foot Mount Democrat into public ownership.

With the acreage under Forest Service control, CFI was clear to work on Democrat's summit trail, a path that needed a tremendous amount of hands-on stewardship. A two-year grant from the National Forest Foundation and Great Outdoors Colorado allowed crews to begin work in 2025; newly granted funding from Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Outside 285 Regional Partnership Initiative will allow CFI to remain on the mountain through 2027.

In year one, CFI appointed its first-ever, all-woman, fixed-site crew, which was tasked with providing the mountain its first meaningful dose of attention in recent memory. "The trail uses an old alignment that tried to avoid private land," says Miriam Venman-Clay, a CFI field programs manager. "It's

not ideal, but it's what we have to work with." The challenging trail placement just meant the Democrat crew would have to get creative to protect the local flora, some of which is rare and found only in Colorado. "Because we haven't been able to work there in a long time, the trail is rotting away and endangering those species," Venman-Clay says. "We could have a crew up there for 10 years and not finish everything that needs to be done."

But the crew had to start somewhere. First, they spent a full hitch harvesting, stripping, and hauling beetle-kill trees for use as 12-foot logs, which would be helicoptered into four locations on Mount Democrat. As the season progressed, a Rocky Mountain Youth Corps group—and several volunteer squads—joined the crew, a boost in people power that helped accomplish an enormous amount of deferred maintenance. On their own, though, the fixed-site crew installed a handful of erosion-battling, grade-stabilizing timber check steps; placed 800 square feet of rock disguise to narrow the too-wide trail; erected 763 square feet of backwall to support unstable tundra; and built 1,916 square feet of rip-rap wall. "The transformation so far has been striking," Venman-Clay says. "Year two should be even more dramatic."

MAJOR FUNDERS Great Outdoors Colorado, National Forest Foundation, Chrest Foundation, USDA Forest Service

Mount Blue Sky

WEST RIDGE ROUTE

& Mount Bierstadt

WEST SLOPES ROUTE

➔ At CFI, we aren't afraid of mixing things up or reinventing ourselves, especially if an off-beat idea solves a problem. Case in point: For only the second time in our 31 years, staffers split a fixed-site crew between two peaks over the length of the season. "We had two peaks that required work, but not enough to fill an entire season," says CFI field programs manager Miriam Venman-Clay. "The logistics were challenging, but we moved forward with what we jokingly called BlueBierd."

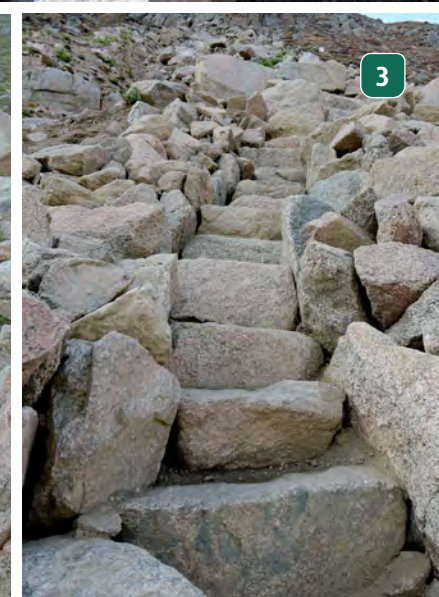
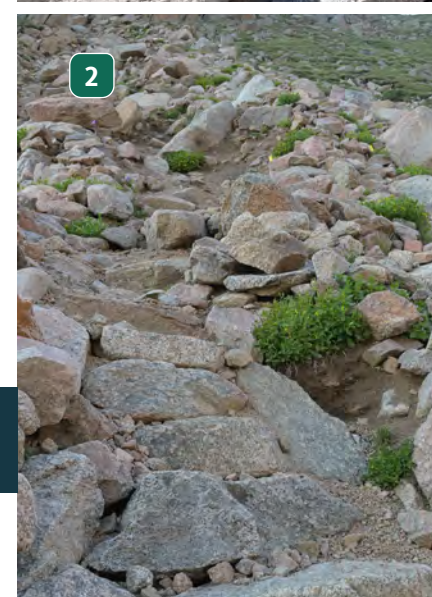
BlueBierd is both a portmanteau of Mounts Blue Sky and Bierstadt and a hat-tip to the many people who mispronounce Bierstadt as Bierdstadt—and the work that would be required on both trails was almost as ridiculous as the mashup itself. The two main goals for the four hitches the crew would spend on Bierstadt were to replace the decking on the popular fourteener's 2000s-era boardwalk and to install elevated causeways along the trail where water was pooling, causing hikers to go off trail.

Although replacing more than 300 linear feet of wooden planks may not sound difficult, the laughable aspect was the team couldn't use drills to replace the 2,700 industrial screws. Because Mount Bierstadt is in a wilderness area, power tools aren't allowed without permission from the Forest Service. Add to that the fact that so many hikers ply Bierstadt's path that trail crews had to alter their office hours to accommodate them. "It's just rush hour all the time," Venman-Clay says, noting that more than 600 hikers can summit on a busy weekend day, "so we split our work into a shorter daytime stint and then a longer nighttime shift."

After successfully wrapping up operations on Bierstadt, the team shifted to Mount Blue Sky to address a 12-year-old landslide that had obliterated part of the trail. What CFI didn't realize when they planned the operation was that the road up Blue Sky would be closed for construction. So, instead of a half-mile hike to the worksite, the crew would need to trek four miles, one way, each day.

The BlueBierd crew took the hardships in stride and set to work re-delineating trail through the landslide. That meant installing hundreds of square feet of rip-rap and backwall. It also meant that on steep, loose terrain—where it was often one step up and two steps back—the crew had to run two griphoists to move massive rocks out of the way or into position for use as steps, all in service of re-making a sustainable trail that hikers can once again easily follow.

MAJOR FUNDERS Great Outdoors Colorado, National Forest Foundation, Chrest Foundation, Estate of Steve Ovel, individual CFI donors



32

Rock check steps built on Bierstadt

302

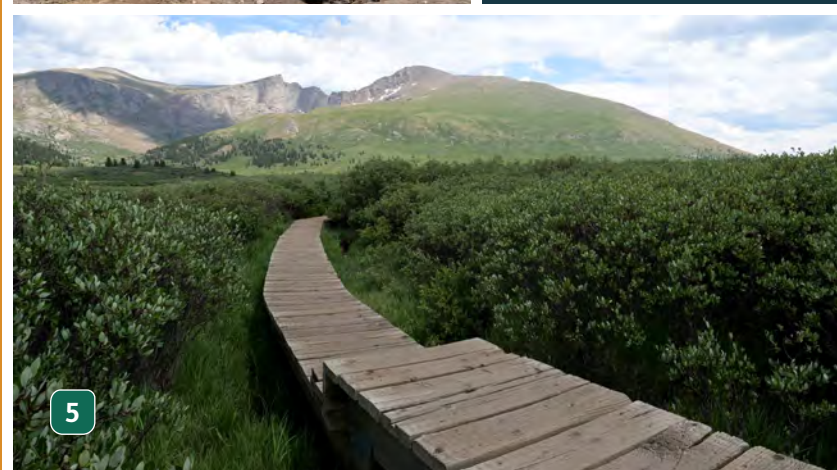
Linear feet of boardwalk replaced on Bierstadt

465

Square feet of rock disguise completed on Blue Sky

827

Square feet of rip-rap wall installed on Blue Sky



1. A griphoist, rock sling, and rock bar help Emma Waldhoff relocate a boulder on Mount Blue Sky.

2/3. Before/After: Crew members refurbished an old rock staircase that had fallen prey to the elements on Mount Blue Sky.

4. A primitive but vital tool, the rock bar is made of heavy-duty steel and built for prying or rearranging large objects into—or out of—the trail corridor.

5/6. Before/After: New decking on Mount Bierstadt's raised boardwalk means less tripping over warped boards for hikers.

7. Sam Lefkowitz-Quiana was one of five crew members who removed and replaced 300 wooden planks by hand on Mount Bierstadt.



PROTECT BUILDING TRAILS



1

62,143

Linear feet of trail improved

4,135

Linear feet of trail de-rocked

8,400

Linear feet of corridor cleared

3,574

Visitor contacts made

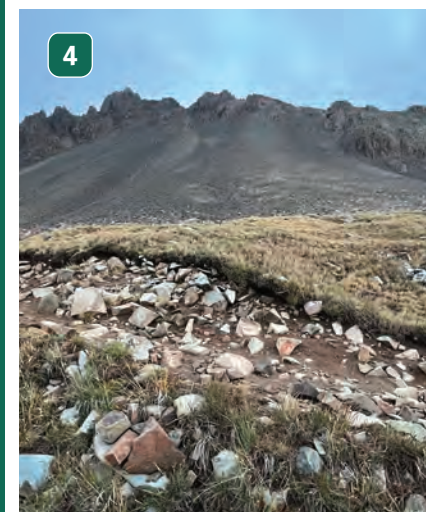


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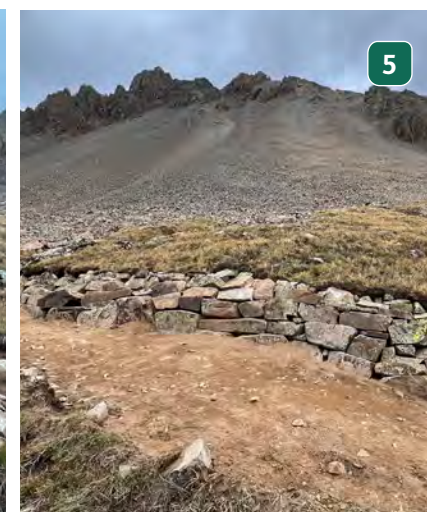


3

1. Using a rock net, trail crews find a new home for a prized boulder on Mount Sneffels.
2. A volunteer works with a crosscut saw on San Luis Peak.
3. It's hard work, but turning logs into timber check steps on Mount Elbert mitigates erosion.
- 4/5. Before/After: Crews de-rocked the trail and erected backwall to support fragile alpine tundra that was being undercut by erosion on Mount Sneffels.



4



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EVERY SUSTAINABLE TRAIL that CFI has built over the past three-plus decades is susceptible to natural forces like mudslides, wildfires, avalanches, and erosive run-off. And no matter how well they are constructed, those routes are also vulnerable to the presence of humans. Enter CFI's Nomad Crew, a roving band of eight maintenance experts, who move from peak to peak executing ongoing repairs so that our existing trails are in the best shape possible.

The Nomad Crew

➔ Mother Nature is reliably fickle, but at CFI, we have come to accept the consistency of her constant changes. In fact, we look at them as an opportunity not only to refurbish older trails in need of up-keep, but also to engage our volunteers in hands-on stewardship.

Each season, our Nomad Crew—formerly known as the Adopt-a-Peak Crew—traverses the state performing routine care as well as undertaking small reconstruction projects on as many as 10 fourteeners. Unlike the more technical work on our fixed sites, these projects are well-suited to the varied experience levels of volunteers. As a result, the Nomad Crew typically hosts more than 40 volunteer projects, single- or multi-day affairs in which individuals or corporate groups with an eye toward conservation sign up to do some of the heavy lifting alongside CFI's professionals.

In 2025, CFI's maintenance crews and their volunteer support combated the degradation that comes with extreme weather events and wayward hiking boots on Quandary Peak, Mount

Massive, San Luis Peak, Mount Sneffels, Mount Elbert, Wetterhorn Peak, and Capitol Peak. They also lent able hands to the fixed-site teams on Mounts Democrat, Bierstadt, and Blue Sky. "The Nomad Crews have to tackle challenging projects," say Nomad Crew operations coordinator Carlie Harrison, "but they also have to quickly impart trail-building know-how to volunteers in a way that's effective and enjoyable. We need to get the job done *and* we need volunteers to want to come back next year."

In all, the 2025 Nomad Crew hosted 43 projects with 545 volunteers who assisted in the maintenance of nearly seven miles of trail over the four-month field season. After tutorials from the experts, volunteers helped erect 634 linear feet of backwall, performed restoration work on 2,282 square feet of terrain, installed 342 timber check steps, planted 483 plugs, and closed 2,291 square feet of braided trail.

Mother Nature may be fickle, but CFI's crews and volunteers are nothing if not reliable.

MAJOR FUNDERS CPW State Trails Program, High Lonesome 100 runners, Great Outdoors Colorado, National Forest Foundation, Kimberly Appelson Memorial Endowed Fund, Nicholas Feinstein Memorial Endowed Fund, Janus Henderson Investors, TINCUP Whiskey, S&P Global, Brinkmann Constructors, Town of Breckenridge, Osprey Packs, Plante Moran, JCC Ranch Camp, Ernst & Young, Pitkin County, City of Aspen, Summit Foundation, individual CFI donors

CFI DOESN'T JUST BUILD TRAILS, it studies them. For more than a decade, our Sustainable Trails Program has used infrared hiker counters and geographic information system-based inventories to monitor trail conditions and use levels on Colorado's fourteeners, turning raw field data into crew deployment decisions and transparent reporting.

Sustainable Trails Program

Many trail-building organizations rely on instinct. CFI relies on facts. Since 2014, the Sustainable Trails Program has been tracking exactly where hiker and weather impacts are accumulating on Colorado's fourteeners and uses those statistics to direct crew resources where they're needed most. The result is a body of evidence that doesn't just inform CFI's work; it's ultimately available to the funders and partners—in the form of CFI's Statewide 14er Report Card—who make that work possible.

Facts, however, don't always come easy. "Capturing every feature, every issue caused by humans or nature, is a step-by-step, foot-by-foot effort," says CFI's Tom Cronin, who has been on the Sustainable Trails team since 2017. In 2025, he, along with field projects coordinator Mac Gibson, inventoried the Black Cloud and the Northeast Ridge routes of Mount Elbert as well as the Northwest Ridge route up Mounts Belford and Oxford. "We were able to capture all the recent work CFI has done on these Elbert routes to see how and if the conditions improved," Cronin says, "and we were able to fully understand the poor shape the Belford-Oxford route is currently in." Ongoing investments in routes generally translate into dramatic condition improvements, while routes not seeing work for several years deteriorate.

Much like the GIS-based inventorying, the infrared hiker counters—of which CFI places 24 each season—require boots on the ground. "Placing them is a bit of an art form," says CFI executive director Lloyd Athearn. "You have to think about the position of the sun, about where hikers will be moving and where they might stop, and about how to hide the counters from curious humans." Done right, CFI is not only able to gather valuable information about how many hiking boots are using its trails, but it can also extrapolate the statewide economic impact attributable to hiking fourteeners, based on economic expenditure studies performed by Colorado State University researchers. In summer 2025, CFI released its 2024 hiking-use report, which estimated 265,000 hiker-use days, an increase of 1.9 percent from 2023. Increased use on the reopened Decalibron Loop was largely offset by declines on Grays and Torreys peaks and Mount Elbert due to parking restrictions and strict enforcement. The economic impact? An estimated \$71.9 million, just one more statistic that CFI relies on to explain why the work we do is so critical to the state of Colorado.



1. The metrics gathered by CFI field programs manager Tom Cronin on the trail to Mounts Belford and Oxford will help inform how and when the nonprofit plans future work projects on the route.

2. CFI executive director Lloyd Athearn downloads data from the Huron Peak trail counter.

14ER USE ESTIMATED HIKING USE ON COLORADO'S 14ERS

Total Hiker Use Days: 265,000 (2024 Data)

Front Range	Best Est: 86,500
Longs Peak	7,000-10,000
Pikes Peak	10,000-15,000*
Torreys Peak	15,000-20,000*
Grays Peak	
Mount Blue Sky	20,000-25,000
Mount Bierstadt	25,000-30,000*

Mosquito Range	Best Est: 22,500
Mount Lincoln	15,000-20,000*
Mount Bross	
Mount Democrat	
Mount Sherman	7,000-10,000*

Tenmile Range	Best Est: 26,500
Quandary Peak	25,000-30,000*

Elk Mountains	Best Est: 9,000
Castle Peak	1,000-3,000*
Maroon Peak	1,000-3,000
North Maroon Peak	
Capitol Peak	1,000-3,000
Snowmass Mountain	<1,000
Pyramid Peak	1,000-3,000

Sawatch Range	Best Est: 76,500
Mount Elbert	15,000-20,000*
Mount Massive	3,000-5,000
Mount Harvard	3,000-5,000
La Plata Peak	3,000-5,000*
Mount Antero	1,000-3,000
Mount Shavano	5,000-7,000*
Tabeguache Peak	
Mount Belford	5,000-7,000
Mount Oxford	
Mount Princeton	5,000-7,000*
Mount Yale	5,000-7,000
Mount Columbia	3,000-5,000
Missouri Mountain	3,000-5,000
Mt. of the Holy Cross	3,000-5,000
Huron Peak	7,000-10,000*

Sangre de Cristo Range	Best Est: 8,500
Blanca Peak	1,000-3,000
Ellingwood Point	
Crestone Peak	1,000-3,000
Crestone Needle	1,000-3,000
Kit Carson Peak	<1,000*
Challenger Point	
Humboldt Peak	1,000-3,000
Culebra Peak	<1,000
Mount Lindsey	<1,000
Little Bear Peak	<1,000

San Juan Mountains	Best Est: 35,500
Uncompahgre Peak	5,000-7,000
Mount Wilson	1,000-3,000
El Diente Peak	1,000-3,000
Mount Eolus	<1,000
Windom Peak	<1,000
Sunlight Peak	<1,000
Handies Peak	5,000-7,000*
Mount Sneffels	5,000-7,000*
Redcloud Peak	3,000-5,000*
Sunshine Peak	
Wilson Peak	1,000-3,000*
Wetterhorn Peak	3,000-5,000
San Luis Peak	1,000-3,000

Approximation Notes

*Indicates data drawn from CFI TRAFx recorders, with data gap and early/late season infills from either previous years or nearby peak data. All other estimates are interpolated from a correlation between TRAFx data and reported 14ers.com peak use statistics.

Range and overall totals are adjusted to account for the frequent practice of summiting multiple peaks in one day.



1

1. Longtime Peak Steward Max Gramly chats with hikers at the Mount Bierstadt trailhead.
2. CFI operations manager Hannah Clark leads Peak Steward training at Mount Bierstadt.
3. Forrest Athearn takes footage of the Mount Yale restoration site for a forthcoming video series on alpine restoration.
4. Glacier is one of CFI's four-legged Peak Stewards, who helps his human Peak Steward educate hikers about climbing with pets.
5. Veteran Peak Stewards help train newbies at Mount Bierstadt.

39

Peak Stewards who spent time in the field

5,756

Hikers whom Peak Stewards spoke with about LNT practices

16

Outreach events hosted by Peak Stewards

32,520

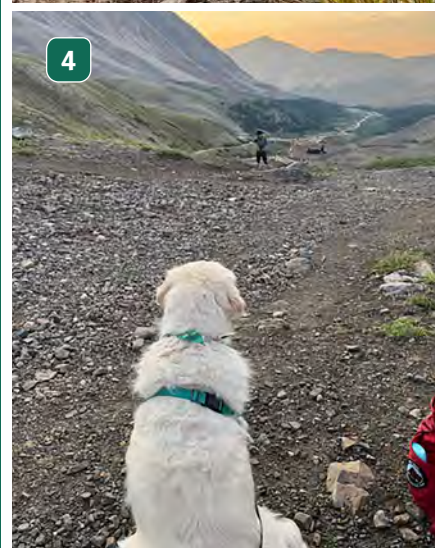
Video views on CFI's YouTube channel in 2025



2



3



4



5

CFI CAN BUILD SUSTAINABLE TRAILS and restore damaged ecosystems in perpetuity, but spreading the good word about minimum impact practices is just as important to our mission. If we take the time to explain why picking wildflowers is a no-go; if we clarify what is and what is not a durable surface; and if we illuminate the risks that campfires and human waste pose, then our mission to protect the fourteeners becomes markedly easier.

Education & Outreach

➔ Every May for the past seven years, CFI operations manager Hannah Clark has set an early alarm on a Saturday, thrown on a logoed jacket, packed up her plastic bin of gear, and headed to a Front Range fourteener to lead training for CFI's Peak Stewards, volunteers who donate their time to educate the public about recreating responsibly in the alpine. Why? "Because it's vitally important that we protect these amazing places for the generations to come," Clark says.

The Peak Stewards that Clark coaches up agree to spend at least four days on the fourteeners—often the most highly trafficked ones in the Front Range, Tenmile Range, and Mosquito Range—to share their knowledge on everything from why it's best (and sometimes required) for dogs to stay on-leash to how to dispose of pet and human waste properly to the items hikers should have in their packs before they embark on their high-elevation adventures. "The number one thing I tell people seems basic: why it matters to stay on the trail," says Mary O'Malley, a Peak Steward since 2019. O'Malley says staying on the trail for the environmental benefits wasn't something she intuitively understood when she came to Colorado. "I'm often

stewarding at peaks where the primary demographic is newer fourteener hikers," she says, "so I stick to two or three elements of Leave No Trace that are immediately actionable on their part, such as staying on the trail, packing out trash, and respecting wildlife."

In 2025, O'Malley, along with 38 other new-and-returning Peak Stewards, participated in the program, contributing 115 days in the field and connecting with 5,756 hikers about Leave No Trace practices. These hardy volunteers didn't stop there though: Peak Stewards hosted 16 outreach events across the state, including 14er Fest in Buena Vista, Denver Beer Co's 14th anniversary event in LoHi, and clinics at area REI locations. These outreach events increased the Leave No Trace IQs of an additional 730 people.

Of course, CFI has other methods of reaching both fourteener enthusiasts and the fourteener curious. The nonprofit has 98 videos on its YouTube channel, which has received more than 590,000 views. CFI was also included in several news and broadcast stories, including pieces in the *Denver Post*, the *Vail Daily*, *Denver Life*, *Backpacker*, *Denver7*, and *Colorado Public Radio*.

Future Plans

CFI HEADS INTO THE FUTURE with more resources, more partners, and more opportunity than at any point in its 31-year history. From more than a million dollars in new federal funding to aspirations of additional land acquisitions to the completion of long-running projects, 2026 and beyond look promising—even though some of the hardest work still lies ahead.

→ UPCOMING TRAIL PROJECTS

MOUNT COLUMBIA

With recent grants in hand from the Colorado State Trails Program and the Forest Service’s Great American Outdoors Act, CFI will return to Mount Columbia to tackle the upper route reconstruction. CFI’s work on Columbia paused in 2020 after five seasons pushing the route to 12,900 feet on this technically challenging trail-build project, where rocks to build trail features had to be transported by highline trams. Hiker feedback that indicated many prospective summiters would prefer to wait for the route to be finished rather than slog up the steep, loose social trail played an important role in securing project funding that will support a 10-member CFI crew on the mountain in 2027 and 2028.

MOUNT PRINCETON

CFI plans to start two seasons of trail reconstruction work in 2027 on one of the last Sawatch peaks without an intentional summit trail, thanks to support from a Great American Outdoors Act grant. The trail work will occur on a talus slope where rocks should be abundant. However, logistical challenges abound in supporting the eight-member crew. There is limited space—most of it sloping—for the base-camp, no water source, and access is by a road with frequent dropoffs and few to no passing areas. Getting to the worksite may actually be the biggest challenge of the Princeton project.

MOUNT DEMOCRAT

The possibility for long-needed trail work on the western half of the Decalibron Loop became a reality after a 2023 land acquisition—and subsequent sale to the Forest Service—finally gave CFI entrée to the flanks of Mount Democrat. A grant from the National Forest Foundation and Great Outdoors Colorado began funding a dedicated CFI crew to work on the 14,154-footer in 2025 and 2026. Newly secured funding from Colorado Parks and Wildlife through the Outside 285 Regional Partnership Initiative will allow CFI to remain on the mountain through 2027 to address the highest priority trail needs. NFF/GOCO funding is also revamping the road to Kite Lake (which will be completely closed during field season 2026), constructing an entry station, and improving camping, parking, and toilet facilities in the area.



Photo by Cameron Miller, cameromillerphotography.com

Alpenglow on Mount Princeton

→ BEYOND THE TRAIL

PRIVATE LAND ACQUISITIONS

CFI continues to partner with The Conservation Fund, the Gehres Fourteeners Fund, and others to advance land acquisition efforts in the Mosquito Range, where the legacy of past mining means that much of the land in the area is privately owned. An additional parcel providing Decalibron Loop trail access and a total of 480 acres of land on the lower slopes of Mount Bross were secured in 2025, building momentum for future land purchases. (Reminder: The summit of Mount Bross remains closed and was not affected by these recent land purchases.) The contested bankruptcy of the defunct Leadville Corp. continues, with resolution seemingly always just a few months out into the future. Will 2026 be the year that ownership of more than 1,000 acres of land, including the summit of Mount Sherman, gets resolved? Hope springs eternal, and CFI plans to be ready to move once the outcome is known.

CABIN COVE IMPROVEMENTS

After decades of using Cabin Cove, a Forest Service–owned property on the banks of Twin Lakes, CFI was able to obtain a 30-year license in 2023 to continue using the 4.9 acres as its mountain headquarters. In place of rent payments, the agreement requires CFI to make annual improvements to two on-site structures—a 1950s-era cabin and a detached garage. Between 2023 and 2025, CFI invested nearly \$60,000 into the property by replacing roofing, garage doors, and an unstable front deck. In 2026, CFI plans to update the electrical system, fix leaky plumbing, and establish a task force to create a five-year plan for further improving the site, which the nonprofit uses as both a staging area for field season operations and a home base for seasonal workers between hitches.

DOCUMENTARY FILM OPPORTUNITY

It’s not often that nonprofits receive unexpected gifts of \$120,000. It’s even rarer for a person who donates such a sum of money to suggest it be used to broaden awareness of the mission rather than directing it toward boots on the ground. In late 2025, CFI received such a generous contribution, along with the directive that we use it toward making a documentary film about the work we do. As a result, in 2026 CFI plans to begin the process of finding the right creative studio for the job. Filming would tentatively begin in field season 2027, and the finished product would ideally premiere at outdoor-focused film festivals in 2028.

Our Team

2025 CORE STAFF

Lloyd Athearn
Executive Director
Erin Button
Administrative Assistant
Hannah Clark
Operations Manager
Tom Cronin
Field Programs Manager
Macfarland Gibson
Field Projects Coordinator
Carlie Harrison
Nomad Crew Operations Coordinator
Lindsey King
Deputy Director
John Skadow
Controller
Miriam Venman-Clay
Field Programs Manager

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2025 CORE STAFF

From left: Lloyd Athearn, Macfarland Gibson, Tom Cronin, Miriam Venman-Clay, Hannah Clark, Carlie Harrison, John Skadow, Lindsey King
Not pictured: Erin Button



2025 SEASONAL STAFF

Back row, from left: Sam Lefkowitz-Quiana, TJ Harms-Synkiew, Bryan “Melvin” Lambert, Luke Peterson, James Boardman, Gibson Kenney, Tyler Warren, Chris Bjork, Anthony Ryans, Ryan Kunish
Middle row, from left: Jo Devilbiss, Riley Olds, Lane Whitcomb, Allie Shedleski, Julia Rudlaff, Erin Bugee, Eve Monaghan, Grace Wotell, Melinda Callender
Front row, from left: Grace Larson, Emma Waldhoff, Heather Johnson, David Sandberg, Griffin Ganz, Kate Barrett, Parrish Garver, Kim Cathcart
Not pictured: Melissa Dahud

2025 Project Teams

MOUNTS BLUE SKY & BIERSTADT
Heather Johnson
Sam Lefkowitz-Quiana
Riley Olds
David Sandberg
Emma Waldhoff

MOUNT DEMOCRAT
Kate Barrett
Erin Bugee
Eve Monaghan
Julia Rudlaff

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Griffin Ganz
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Luke Peterson
Allie Shedleski
Tyler Warren

NOMAD CREW —MARMOT CREW
Melissa Dahud
Lane Whitcomb
Nick Wotell
Grace Wotell

NOMAD CREW —PIKA CREW
Melinda Callender
Parrish Garver
Ryan Kunish
Bryan “Melvin” Lambert

2025 Award Recipients



Rookie of the Year
Holly Brazzle



Trail Steward of the Year
Stephen Milstrey



Volunteer of the Year
David Kennedy

When it comes to hobbies, most people hop from one to another as interests wax and wane. David Kennedy is not most people. The 44-year-old Missouri native has become a collector of pastimes, pursuing everything from cross-country skiing and hiking to wood-working and ice climbing. “I’m really bad at releasing hobbies,” says Kennedy, who originally moved to Colorado in 2003. “I just keep going, because I like to learn things.”

Over the past 20 years, Kennedy’s zest for knowledge and unyielding consistency has served CFI well. Not only has he done trail work off and on since 2007 and not missed a monthly donation since 2006, but he has also served on the nonprofit’s board of directors, including as the chair in 2024-’25, since 2019.

During those seven years, Kennedy’s broad skillset has come in handy. He created an easy-to-track dashboard for the nonprofit’s most recent strategic plan. His background in human resources proved useful on occasion. And his passion for landscape photography has earned his images a place in CFI’s marketing materials. Kennedy likes to downplay his renaissance man status though, saying, “I’m pretty sure I became board chair because I can help with a PowerPoint presentation.”

We can neither confirm nor deny that possibility, but we can say with confidence that CFI has been better for Kennedy’s dedication to its cause. “CFI’s job will never be done,” Kennedy says. “I only have two more years on the board, but I hope I can continue to help it be sustainable for the long haul.”



Special Recognition Award
Glenn Randall



Corporate Partner of the Year
Davis Graham & Stubbs



Special Recognition Award
The Feinstein Family

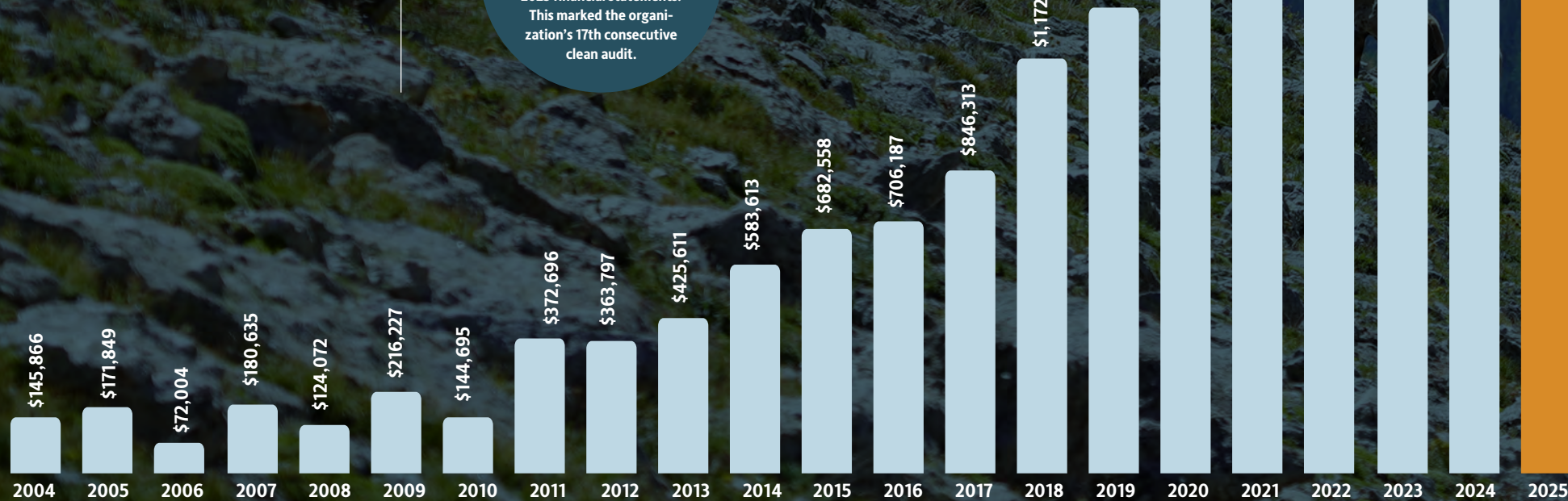


Special Recognition Award
Freestone Endurance

Peak Steward of the Year: Cindy Haddleton
Agency Partner of the Year: Brendan Kelly
Foundation Partner of the Year: Scheffel-Anderson Charitable Family Fund

Financial Snapshot

CFI had another banner year in 2025, reflecting increased investments in the fourteeners and bolstered long-term resources that can cover emergencies and fund work in future years. Revenues and expenses both hit all-time highs and exceeded \$2 million for the third consecutive year. The net surplus at year-end of \$409,829 (16 percent of revenues) was the largest ever and brought total net assets to \$2,624,498. Most of 2025’s surplus consisted of funds restricted to future projects or donations to long-term endowments. Only \$13,539 of the year-end surplus was unrestricted.



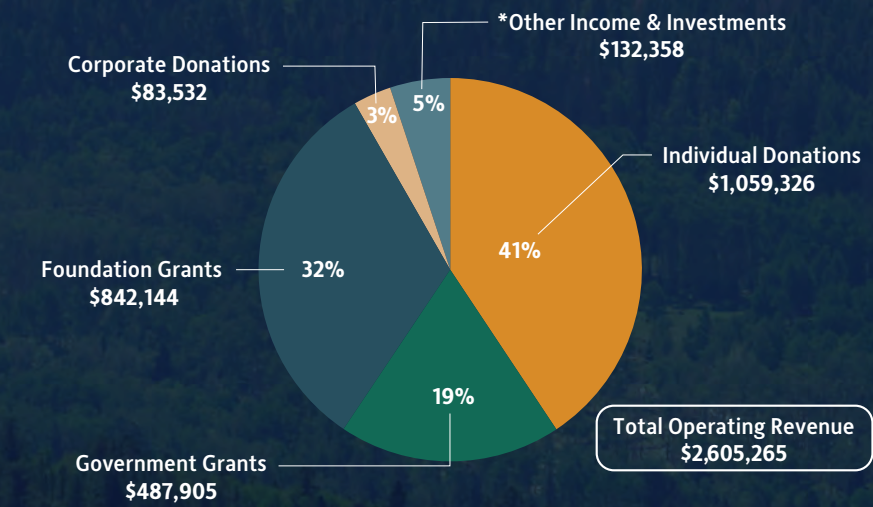
Total Net Assets

➔ Total net assets grew 19 percent in 2025 to reach an all-time high of \$2,624,498. Endowments accounted for \$665,025 of this total, of which \$223,425 was donor restricted and \$441,600 was board designated. The Terry Mathews Reserve Fund, which is designed to cover financial emergencies, had a balance at year-end of \$413,461. CFI also had other retained cash in investment accounts. Included in net assets were restricted donations totaling almost \$510,000 that will be used in future years on specific projects, land acquisitions, and other programs. CFI owns 41 acres of land on and near the summit of Mount Shavano worth \$55,841 and has net property and equipment (less depreciation and amortization) of \$703,103 for office equipment, field vehicles and tools, leasehold improvements, and operating lease right-of-use assets for the Lake-wood headquarters and the Cabin Cove operations base facility.

Audit

CFI received a clean, GAAP-based audit from JDS Professional Group for its 2025 financial statements. This marked the organization’s 17th consecutive clean audit.

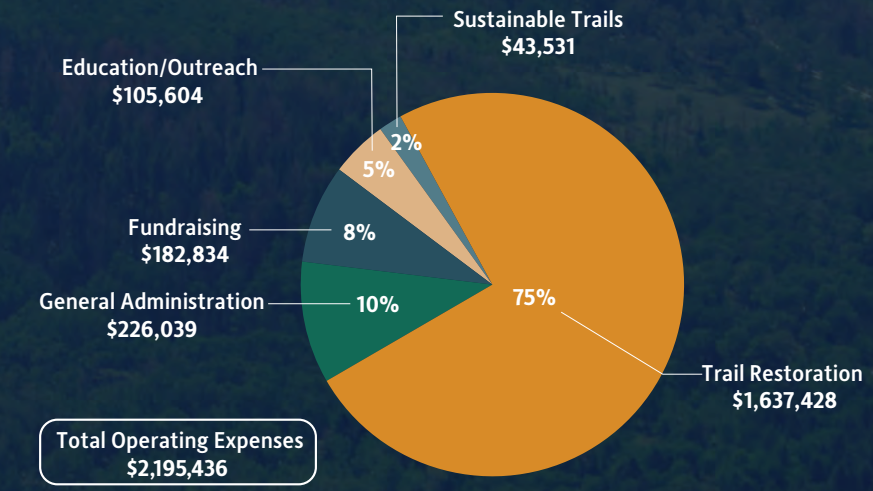
Operating Revenue



Total operating revenues for 2025 were \$2,605,265, an increase of \$397,143 (18 percent) compared to last year. This was the fourth consecutive year in which revenues exceeded \$2 million. Since 2020, CFI’s total revenues have increased by more than \$1 million (65 percent). Donations from individuals again led all giving categories by contributing \$1,059,326 (41 percent) to total revenues, an increase of \$15,975 (+1.5 percent) from 2024. Giving from individuals and foundations controlled by individuals continued to provide roughly one out of every two dollars received by CFI, showing the tremendous generosity of those who climb the fourteeners. A \$120,000 anonymous gift to fund a future documentary film about CFI, and a \$100,000 donation from first-time donors to help further trail construction and land acquisition efforts in 2026 were the two largest individual gifts. Foundation giving of \$842,144 (32 percent of total revenues) was the second-largest revenue category, rebounding by \$567,868 (207 percent) from 2024’s record low. The National Forest

Foundation returned as the largest foundation donor (\$294,815) after a year-long pause due to grant timing issues. Continued support at \$100,000 or more from the Saguguachipa Foundation and Chrest Foundation added to the higher foundation support in 2025. As was foreshadowed in 2024’s annual report, government grants fell to their second-lowest share of revenues ever (19 percent), a fact that’s largely attributable to the withdrawal of the Forest Service’s general administrative support (\$135,000) for the first time in more than two decades, as well as a reduction in projects supported by the federal Great American Outdoors Act. Two grants from the Colorado State Trails Program totaling \$235,704 led government giving. Investment returns on CFI’s consolidated endowment and reserve funds, in-kind gifts of products and services to support the mission, and other miscellaneous income accounted for five percent of total revenues (\$132,358). Corporate donations totaled three percent of total giving (\$83,532), with Janus Henderson Investors leading the category.

Operating Expenses



Total operating expenses for the year were a record \$2,195,436, a six percent increase (+\$126,988) over 2024. This marked the third year in which total expenses exceeded \$2 million and was a 54 percent increase over 2020. The share of CFI’s budget devoted to programmatic activity increased to 82 percent in 2025, up two percentage points over 2024 and equal to the second-highest percentage ever. Trail-restoration-related expenses totaled \$1,637,428 in 2025, accounting for three out of every four dollars spent by CFI, which equaled the highest share ever. This category included CFI’s fixed-site trail construction projects, mobile maintenance crews, and anything involved with moving rocks, soil, and plants. The Mount Democrat and BlueBierd projects were new this year, replacing two independent crews that worked on Mount Elbert in 2024. Expenses related to administering the organization were \$226,039 last year, representing 10 percent of all expenditures, a decline of three percentage points compared to the prior year. The controller transition in 2024 resulted

in overlapping finance positions as an interim controller bridged both the outgoing and incoming people, which led to higher administration costs that year. Conversely, fundraising expenses were up last year by \$44,473 (32 percent), totaling \$182,834. This accounted for staff time spent writing grants and soliciting donations, as well as the cost of materials and postage for the annual year-end fundraising appeal. The eight percent of total expenses devoted to fundraising last year was just below the 10-year average of nine percent. A total of \$105,604 was spent on education and outreach in 2025, down \$21,726 (17 percent) from 2024. This was principally due to reduced staff time allocated to education and outreach, as well as the fact that no new videos were produced in 2025. The \$43,531 spent on Sustainable Trails work in 2025 (two percent of total expenses) was almost identical to the \$43,717 spent the prior year. This represented staff time spent conducting trail inventories, maintaining the thermal trail counters, and working on reports incorporating both sets of data.

2025 Donors

Organizational Donors

SUMMIT CIRCLE (\$20,000+)
Harlan E. Anderson Foundation
Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation
Chrest Foundation
Gehres Fourteeners Fund at Colorado Mountain Club Foundation
Colorado Parks and Wildlife State Trails Program
Great Outdoors Colorado
National Forest Foundation
Saguguachipa Foundation
USDA Forest Service

54 CLUB (\$10,000-\$19,999)
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Town of Breckenridge
The William Kistler Coors Foundation
El Pomar Foundation
The Gateway Fund II of The Denver Foundation
Janus Henderson Investors
Japanese Auto Service
Luna’s Tacos & Tequila,
In Memory of Nicholas Feinstein
Osprey Packs

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Davis Graham & Stubbs LLP
Pitkin County Community Grants
TINCUP Whiskey
Wilson Conservation Trust

MOUNT MASSIVE CLUB (\$2,500-\$4,999)
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Big Agnes
Brinkmann Constructors
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MET Foundation
Peak State Coffee
Plante Moran
S&P Global
The Summit Foundation

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The Orchard Foundation
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Castle Family
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Alex Etkin Advised Fund
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Andy and Kerry Feinstein,
In Memory of Nicholas Feinstein
Gabriel Gilbert
John Golob
Steve Grundmeier
High Lonesome Runners
Steve and Jenny Hoerger
Sally Ottaway
Pericle Communications Company
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Andy and Alison Sheahen
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Kathryn E. Williams Advised Fund
Rich and Kelly Woessner

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William Baribault,
In Memory of Nicholas Feinstein

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Herb and Karen Vogel Family Charitable Fund
Hunt Walker Family Fund
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High Lonesome Runners
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Andy and Alison Sheahen
Mark and Kim Smith
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SUPPORTING PARTNER (\$100–\$249)
741 Donors

PARTNER (\$50–\$99)
359 Donors

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294 Donors

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Krista Hall
Richard Heppe
Mandy Hughes
Stanley E. Jones
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Adelaide Leavens
Robert LeClair
Chong Lor and Matthew Underwood
Brad and Melissa McQueen
Peter and Kelly Merrion
Peter Metcalf
Joseph Morrell
Nate Palmer
Joan Prinaris
Stephen Ruyle
Sarah Simon
Hunt Walker
Stephanie Welsh

LEGACY SOCIETY ENDOWMENT DONORS
Taking care of Colorado’s fourteeners is a forever task. Yet even the most passionate CFI supporter won’t be able to do so forever.
As of December 31, 2025, estate gifts from the following individuals, other endowment donations, and investment gains have grown the general endowment to \$450,182 and provided for a \$413,461 cash reserve fund to support CFI through emergencies.
Additionally, CFI has two memorial endowed funds named after young people who were lost in tragic outdoor accidents: The Kimberly Appelson Memorial Endowed Fund and the Nicholas Feinstein Memorial Endowed Fund. Both memorial funds support apprentice positions with CFI’s Nomad maintenance crew, providing aspiring trail builders with training and mentorship opportunities. Last year the Feinstein family hosted a fundraiser in Windsor, Colorado, that raised more than \$38,000, helping grow the Feinstein fund to more than \$132,000.
Anonymous (1)
Kimberly Appelson
Jim DiNapoli
Dan Fischer
Anne Lutz
Terry Mathews
Bill Moore
Steve Ovel
Anne Vickery
Ashton J. Villars, Jr.



FRONT COVER

Wildflowers on the trail to Capitol Peak
Photo by Glenn Randall

BACK COVER

A Rocky Mountain red fox spotted on
Wetterhorn Peak



PROTECT | RESTORE | EDUCATE

ANNUAL REPORT

2025



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Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
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